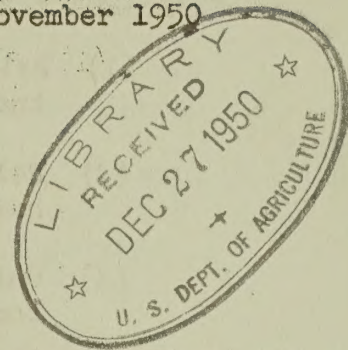


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DISTRICT SUPERVISORS' CONTRIBUTION
TO BETTER COUNTY EXTENSION PUBLIC RELATIONS

A Few Suggestive Tips*



Just a Word.--Good Extension public relations have their greatest influence and value in the counties. Add together the rural and urban people's conception of and confidence in extension work in each of the counties and States of the Nation. The sum will measure the total good will for the entire Cooperative Extension Service.

Each Extension staff member is an ambassador of the entire organization. It is therefore important to the county, to the State, and to the national organization that each agent consider everything undertaken from the vantage point of its effectiveness in influencing the spread of better practices, in keeping people informed, and in reporting Extension progress to both urban and rural people.

Efforts to improve public relations, then, should be concentrated mostly at the grass roots where Extension's job is being done. This places a large responsibility upon the county extension agent to learn and practice good public relations. It places a large responsibility, too, upon the district supervisor to train and help county workers to have a better appreciation of public relations methods and how to use them.

Page the District Supervisor.--The district supervisor's contribution to better public relations might be undertaken in numerous ways. The following broad areas are suggestive:

- (1) Training county extension workers in the techniques of public relations to help in: (a) Doing the best possible Extension teaching job with their regular cooperators; (b) widening Extension influence beyond the sphere of the existing cooperators to reach those eligible rural people not now being reached; and (c) reporting Extension activities and results to all people in the county, including those town and city people who do not participate in the direct services of extension work.
- (2) Backgrounding agents with a clear understanding of the nature of the Cooperative Extension Service and the objectives, principles, policies, and philosophy for which it stands. This is essential so that agents can interpret these basic ideas more intelligently to their volunteer leaders, their cooperators, and the general public.

Prepared by Lester A. Schlup for Extension intra-regional conference of district supervisors in the South.

Relations With Whom?--Extension public relations in the county include:

- (1) Relations with rural cooperators . . . the rural people who know and use the services of the agent.
- (2) Relations with rural people who are eligible for Extension help, but who are not now participating.
- (3) Relations with the various farm, business, civic, and other compact groups in the county.
- (4) Relations with the general mass of people in the towns and cities.
- (5) Relations with other government organizations which have programs operating in the county.
- (6) Relations with elected governmental representatives.
- (7) Relations with other Extension staff members.

Some Questions.--The following are designed to help the district agent to know what to look for when working with the county extension agent in strengthening public relations. They are suggestive only. Most of them have been gleaned from practices already in operation in some counties:

- (1) Does the county extension agent invite key representatives of all local interests to participate in the program-planning process?
- (2) Does the agent use the program-planning meeting to report on Extension activities undertaken and accomplishments made by rural people during the previous year, bringing in local names as much as possible and paying tribute to volunteer leaders?
- (3) Does the agent stimulate volunteer leaders' interest in the program by keeping them actively participating, by informing them about immediate objectives, and by giving adequate recognition when it is due.
- (4) Is the agent sufficiently filled in about the nature, policies, and objectives of the State extension program?
- (5) Is the agent given an adequate understanding of Extension traditions, philosophy, and ethics?
- (6) Are the agent's relations with groups, opinion leaders, and people in the county of such character as to give him or her stature as a recognized leader of all matters which pertain to rural welfare?
- (7) Does the agent have friendly and constructive relations with other Federal, State, and county government organizations in the county

which help them to adjust the local application of their programs in terms of public attitudes and thinking in the county? Do these relations promote a coordinated approach to county rural problems?

- (8) Does the agent have close relations with the editors of the weekly and daily press in the county and the managers of radio stations? Does he or she use freely the facilities of press and radio for communicating with people?
- (9) Does the agent keep the proper county officials informed about extension work? Does he or she have similar contacts with members of the State and National legislatures who reside in the county?
- (10) Does the agent emphasize in public utterances the accomplishments of Extension cooperators who have adopted Extension practices over personal achievements? Does the agent give other people credit, even though the achievement is largely his or her own?
- (11) Do people in the agent's county know that the agent is backed up by the tremendous knowledge resources of the land-grant college and the U. S. Department of Agriculture; that the work of the agent is financed jointly by the county, State, and Federal governments?
- (12) Is the county extension agent's office clean, attractive, and orderly? Is it comfortable and convenient for callers? Does it give the impression of efficiency and friendly service? Are bulletin racks available and filled with bulletins that are seasonally helpful? Are visual aids in the form of posters, displays, slides, and photographs, handy to illustrate needed information to visitors?
- (13) Do appropriate signs identify the location of the county extension office on the outside of the building and on the office door? Do such signs indicate that extension work is a cooperative undertaking of the county, the State land-grant college, and the U. S. Department of Agriculture?
- (14) Are proper listings of the agent's office made in the telephone directory so that people can readily locate the agent?
- (15) Are written and telephoned requests for information handled promptly and in a friendly spirit of helpfulness? Are letters typed neatly, and are the contents in conformity with the public responsibility of the agent to serve all people equally?
- (16) Is the office secretary trained in giving courteous, adequate, and prompt attention to visitors or telephone callers? Does the agent keep the office secretary advised regarding absences from the office so that the secretary can give specific information to visitors regarding arrangements for future conferences? Are all promises carefully kept or accounted for?

- (17) Has the agent erected roadside signs showing the location of the county extension office; also signs identifying the character of demonstrations being conducted?
- (18) Does the agent gain the cooperation of business in using store windows, theater lobbies, and the like for exhibits and displays featuring special extension events? Does he or she enlist the cooperation of business in other ways?
- (19) Are the agent's personality and attitudes toward the extension job and people of such a nature as to insure public confidence in the work? Does the agent have friendly and mutually supporting relations with Extension colleagues?
- (20) Are the agent's circular letters neat, attractive, and informative?
- (21) Is the county extension program a well-balanced one for rural men, women, and youth? Is the agent making a special effort to reach and serve all people in the county who are entitled to Extension help?
- (22) Does the agent give adequate recognition in the press, on the radio, at meetings, and otherwise to rural people who have successfully adopted Extension-recommended practices?